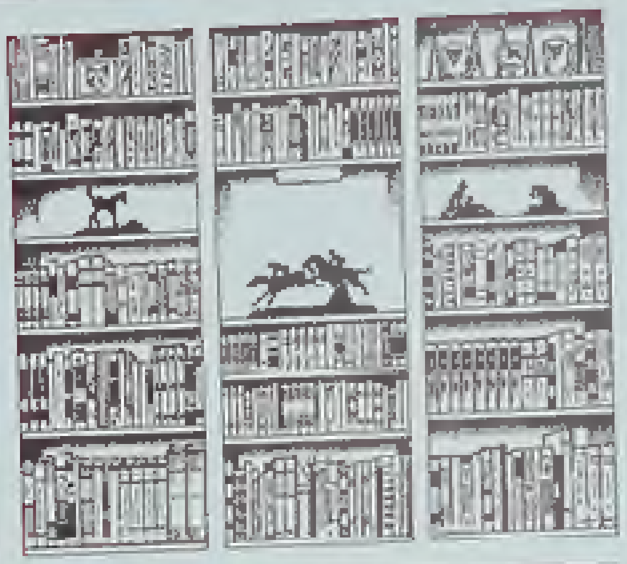
RIDING TO HOUNDS ON LONG ISLAND

BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT



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Mittau 1816

Theodore Roosevelt

Riding to Hounds on Long Island.

~~I have been unfortunate~~ rather ~~in choosing my title~~ The title of this article is chosen especially to emphasize the fact that what is often spoken of as fox hunting ~~in this country~~ around New York is not foxhunting at all, in the English ~~term~~ sense of the term, but an entirely different, although allied, form of sport; namely, riding to drag hounds. In the northeastern states riding to hounds is a sport of recent growth, but during the past decade it has taken a constantly increasing hold among young men fond of the more adventurous kinds of athletic pursuits, and there are now at least seven firmly established hunts; the Elkridge in Maryland, the Rose Tree near Philadelphia, the ~~[illegible]~~ Genesee Valley in central New York, the Essex County in New Jersey, the Meadowbrook and Rockaway on Long Island, and finally the one in the neighborhood of Boston, in many ways ~~one of the~~ among the very best, ~~and~~ whose members are ~~exceptionally~~ thorough sportsmen and both good and bold riders, but who, ~~[illegible] with [illegible] [illegible] of humour~~ have seen fit to ~~[illegible]~~ curse themselves with the grotesque ~~[illegible] [illegible]~~ title of the "Myopia" hunt. The Elkridge pack, the oldest ~~[illegible]~~ of all, hunts nothing of any kind but wild foxes, ~~[illegible]~~ ... and, ~~to a less extent~~, the Myopia hounds are also run mainly after Reynard himself; but at least nine

the out of ~~five~~ ten run with. The other packs are after a
drag. Most of these hunts are in the neighbourhood of great
cities, and are mainly kept up by young men who come
from them. A few of these are men of leisure, ~~could~~ who can ~~well~~ afford
to devote their whole time to pleasure; but much the ~~greatest~~ largest
number are men in business who work hard and are
obliged to make their sports ~~accommodate~~ accommodate ~~itself~~ themselves to their
more serious occupations. Once or twice a week they can
get off for an afternoon ride across the country, and they
then wish to be absolutely certain of having their run
and of having it at the appointed time; and the only
way to insure this is to have a drag hunt. It is not the
lack of foxes that has made the sport on this side of the
water take ~~so much~~ the form of drag hunting as much as the
fact that ~~most~~ the majority of those ~~men~~ who keep it up are hard working
business men who ~~have not the time to take their amusement~~ wish to make the most out of every moment of the
little time they can spare from their regular occupation.
A single ride across country will ~~give~~ yield more ~~sound health~~ exercise, fun
and excitement than ~~is~~ can be got out of a week's
decorous and dull riding in the park; and a good many young
fellows have waked up to the fact. One such finds that
a good horse will stand two ~~runs~~ afternoons hunting a week; and so he will
get perhaps twenty five afternoons a year, without very much

expense, without neglecting his business, and with the knowledge, that he is ~~enjoying not only a most one of the healthiest health giving sport, but also~~ not only laying in a stock of health but is also enjoying what is ~~the most~~ certainly the most exciting and perhaps also the manliest kind of amusement ~~sport~~ to be found east of the Mississippi river.

Unfortunately so far the farmers themselves have taken but little part or interest ~~interest~~ in the sport; but ~~the~~ this remark does not hold true of the Genesee valley, ~~thanks to the~~ where the hunt, of which Mr Wadsworth is master, is established more firmly and on a more healthy and natural basis than is the case with any of the others except the Elkridge. Quite a number of ~~Not Many~~ men from New York, Buffalo and even Boston come up during the season to follow Mr. Wadsworths hounds; but the bulk of almost every field is ~~the members of the~~ composed of the hard-riding farmers from ~~of~~ the country round about, with whom the pursuit has become really a passion, and who by the way are beginning to find the breeding ~~training~~ and selling of good hunters a very valuable ~~form~~ form of stockraising. The Genesee country is very stiff, mostly ~~with~~ high timber fences, but with stone walls and ditches in addition; the pace at which the hounds go however is not very fast. ~~Part~~ of the pack is ~~of~~ native ~~and part of imported blood; the English hounds are much~~

the ~~fastest~~ speediest and work best together, but the American hounds are said to be very much stauncher and with better noses — although they are hardly suitable for a very fast country. ~~None~~ None but a very high jumper can cross the Genesee country. The Boston hunt on the other hand ~~needs~~ calls less for high jumping and more for pace and handiness; ~~it being~~ the Boston hunt is for a grass country, with rather low stone walls, and steep and rocky hills — although in places also with stiff timber.

My own hunting has been done with the Meadowbrook hounds, in the northern part of Long Island. There are plenty of wild foxes around us, both red and gray, but partly for the reasons given above, and partly because the covers are so large and so nearly continuous, they are not often hunted; although an effort is ~~now being~~ always made to have at least one run every week, or so, after a wild fox, in order to give a chance for the hounds to be properly worked, and to prevent the run from becoming a mere succession of steeplechases. The sport is mainly drag hunting ~~[illegible]~~; and is most exciting, as the ~~country is very~~ fences are high ~~stiff~~ and the pace very fast. It ~~is totally different~~ has very little in common ~~from~~ with English foxhunting, ~~and be~~ however, beyond the fact that both call for ~~a certain amount of~~ jumping and galloping. We lack the variety which gives such a charm to English hunting, ~~and there is not the great variety of country~~, and the where waterjumps, hedges, ditches and fences alternate with each other, and where ~~alternation of waterjumps, hedges, ditches &c, [illegible]~~ a man can never tell what is coming next;

abroad, nor is there [with us] the chance for ~~the~~ rider man to show [so much] headwork in getting [along] ~~through the country~~ and [of course there] ~~no judgment~~ is no ~~chance~~ [opportunity] at all to avail oneself of knowledge of the habits of a hunted animal, but skilful and daring horsemanship is called for quite as much, if not more, while drag hunting; especially over such an exceedingly stiff country as that along the north shore of Long Island. The ~~ground~~ [country] is pretty well wooded, and generally ~~was~~ rolling or hilly, except where we come out on the great stretches of level plain towards the middle of the Island. The fields are small and bounded almost exclusively by high posts and rails; although we occasionally meet a stone wall or hedge, our jumping is almost exclusively over timber. Some of these fences are of the kind called "snake", or "virginia", zig-zagging, with at every angle a pair of upright "poles" crossing each other to bind in the rails. Such a fence may be very high, and of course [the horse has to be brought up to it] ~~has to~~ be taken at an angle, ~~but~~ [[illegible] generally, so can be fairly fast the fence is not taken at a stand still it is generally got over] ~~I think it will generally give way~~."

The common kind of fence however is a much stiffer affair, consisting of morticed posts and rails; the posts are heavy, upright logs, and the rails, three, four or five in number, so stout as not to break unless a horse strikes them uncommonly fair and hard. Three fourths

of our fences are of this sort, which average some what better that four feet in height, with an occasional rasper that will come well up to five. The country being open, and the fences as described, there is nothing to check the speed of the hounds, who run like racers; and towards the end of the season the pace becomes terrific. By the way, it may be as well to mention for the benefit of the very ignorant ([illegible] and the [illegible]) there [illegible] [illegible] individuals [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] appear to get the idea into their heads that drag hunting is a rather tame [illegible] as [illegible] [illegible] drag is [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] accustomed to [illegible] [illegible] amateur) that no other kind of riding, with the exception of steeple chasing, calls for such hard galloping and high jumping, as does riding drag-hounds. Indeed the trouble with drag-hunting as we now carry it on is its tendency to become more and more like a steeple chase, in which none but the very best horses can take part; and the men who are sincerely desirous of seeing this sport become a popular should do all they can to guard against this tendency, and to make the runs such that moderately fair riders on decent horses will be able to have their share of the fun. Drag hunting will not be firmly established until we see at the meets large fields of horsemen who like the exercise of riding, like to see the

lands work and enjoy the hours they are spending in the open, who cannot afford to purchase the cattle to carry them across country at a racing pace, or who can not run the risk of being laid up and kept away from their business. At present the [illegible] were a lot of young men, all of them very well mounted, many of them good, and most of them hard, riders, and almost every one of them bound to be just as well up in the first flight as his horse can carry. This is just as it should be, as far as it goes; but in addition to these [illegible] there ought to be, but there is not, a large representation of the men — and women — who are more modest in their ambitions. The men who ride hard and straight should of course form the nucleus of every hunt; but they should only be a fractional part of those who come out to the meets, for the chief charm of the sport is that almost every man who rides at all can if he chooses enjoy it after his own fashion.

The sport being so new in the north, and the country hunted over being generally so very stiff, there has been a good deal of trouble about getting proper horses. Now, however, the demand has created a supply, and first class hunters are to be had by those who care to pay fair prices. The Long Island country needs a peculiar style of horse, while the[illegible]

requisite being that he shall be a very good and high timber jumper. Quite a number of crack English and Irish hunters have at different times been imported, and some of these have turned out pretty well; but, when they first come over they are utterly unable to cross ~~such big~~ our country, blundering badly at the high timber. Few of them have done as well as the American horses. ~~Doubtless~~ very probably English thoroughbreds, in a grass country, and ~~with the~~ over the peculiar ~~style~~ kinds of obstacles ~~of jumping~~ they have on the other side of the water, would gallop away from a field of our Long Island horses; for they have speed and bottom and are great weight-carriers. But on our ground, where the ~~hunting is like~~ cross country riding is more like like leaping a succession of five and six bar gates than anything else, they do not as a rule, in spite of the enormous prices paid for them, show themselves equal to the native stock. The highest recorded jump ever made was by the American horse Leo. Since I have been with the Meadowbrook hounds they have been hunted in succession by Messrs. Belmont, Morgan and Hitchcock. If the pace is fast and the ~~country stiff~~ [illegible] any man who will keep in the same field with either of the above mentioned gentlemen must have moderately good nerve and a first rate horse; and then

is especially true if the animal to be followed is Mr. Belmont's "Carmelite", a West Virginian horse, Mr. Morgan's "King Cole", of Kentucky blood, or one of Mr. Hitchcock's Irish hunters. Many of the trotting stock, rather curiously, turn out excellent ~~jumpers~~ timber jumpers. There is much of this stock in central New York, and very many of our best horses come from there, and were originally ~~used~~ intended for use in ~~for~~ light wagons. It is impossible to come up at full speed and "fly" a ~~stiff~~ high post-and-rails, in the way a hedge, brook or low fence can be gone at; the horse ~~should~~ generally has to be brought ~~come~~ up at a canter or even a trot, and then buck over by sheer strength of his loins and haunches. ~~Such work~~ [illegible] with trotting blood in him seems to take, and really, to such work; ~~he usually has great haunches. Sometimes almost any horse~~ a horse thought to be of no account may, unexpectedly, turn out to be a good jumper horse; more than once I have known a solemn animal, taken out of a buggy, to fairly astonish ~~any~~ every-body by the indifference and quiet with which he ~~will go~~ went over anything he came to. But, ~~at the speed~~ to keep up with the pace of the Meadowbrook pack, pace and bottom are needed as well as jumping power; and a common, coarse horse, even if a clever fencer, is very apt to be left behind when there is any galloping to be done, and is too apt to shut up before getting to the end of a severe run. Most

of the crack hunters have a great deal of thoroughbred blood in them. The main difficulty will often be, so far as [illegible] to find weight carriers; [illegible] in this respect. Occasionally, a small horse will prove able to carry a much heavier weight than a [illegible] trunk; as in truth the little fifteen-two thoroughbred "Phantom" carries one of the heaviest, as well as one of the hardest, riders in the Meadowbrook hunt well up in the front once or twice a week throughout the whole season.

Most of the meets are held within a dozen miles or so of the kennels; at Farmingdale, Woodbury, Wheatly, Locust Valley, Syosset, or near any one of twenty other queer, quaint, old [illegible] names. They are almost always held in the afternoon, the business men who have come down from the city, jogging over behind the hounds to the appointed place, where they are met by the men who have ridden over direct from their country houses. If the meet is an important one there may be a crowd of onlookers in every kind of trap from a four-in-hand drag to a spider-wheeled buggy drawn by a pair of long-tailed trotters, whose money value far exceeds that of the two best hunters in the whole field. Now and then a breakfast will be given the hunt at some country house, when the whole day will be devoted to sport; perhaps

after wild foxes in the morning and a drag in the afternoon. ~~At every meet, there will be a certain number, unfortunately usually only a small number of outsiders who do~~

After one ~~hunt, in the immediate neighbourhood of my home,~~ meet, at Sagamore Hill, I had the curiosity to go on foot over the course we had taken, measuring the jumps; for it is very difficult to form a correct estimate of a fence's height when in the field, and ~~men see a good deal from about~~ five feet of timber seems a much easier thing to take when sitting ~~around~~ round the fire after dinner than it does when actually faced while the hounds are running. On the particular hunt in question we ran about ten miles, at a rattling pace, with only ~~one~~ two checks, crossing somewhat ~~over~~ more than sixty fences, ~~of these fences~~ mostly posts and rails, stiff as steel, the others being of the kind called 'Virginia' or 'snake'; and not more than ten or a dozen in the whole lot under four feet in height. The highest measured five feet and half an inch, two others were four feet eleven, and nearly a third of the number averaged about four and a half. When the hounds were ~~originally~~ cast off some forty riders were present, but the first fence was a savage one, and stopped all who did not mean genuine hard going. Twenty-six horses crossed it, one of them ridden by a lady. A mile or so further on, before there had been a chance for much tailing, we came to a five-bar gate, out

of a road; where a jump of just four feet five wide from the take off. Up to this of course we went one at a time, at a hot hand gallop, and twenty five horses cleared it in succession without a single refusal and with but one mistake; which speaks pretty well for the mounts of the men who rode [illegible]. Owing to the severity of the pace [illegible] there were [illegible] large [illegible] a good many falls took place resulting in an unusually large percentage of accidents; the [illegible] partially dislocated one knee, another man broke two ribs, and another — the present writer — broke his arm. However almost all of us managed to struggle through to the end in time to see the worry; and as the score of rather battered riders turned their horses heads homeward I could not help thinking that we looked a good deal as if we had been taking part in some feat of arms as gentle and joyous as that of Ashby-de-la-Zouche. But it would be very unfair to think the sport especially dangerous on account of the [illegible] accidents that happen. A man who is fond of riding, but who sets a good deal of value, either for [illegible] business, upon his neck and limbs, can hunt with almost perfect safety if he gets a quiet horse, a safe fencer, and does not try to stay in the front rank. Most accidents seem to me with green or wild horses [illegible]

, those who ride ~~with the front~~ in the first only at the expense of ~~heavily~~ laming their mounts; and a fall ~~from a~~ with a done out "~~horse~~ cast" is always peculiarly disagreeable. Most falls however do no harm whatever to either horse or rider, and after they have picked themselves up and shaken themselves ~~they can~~ the run can be continued just as well as ever. ¶ Of course a man who wishes to keep in the first flight must expect to face a certain number of tumbles; but even he probably will not be hurt at all, and he can avoid many a mishap by coming up on his horse whenever he can, that is, by always taking a gap when possible, going at the lowest panel of any fence, and not calling on ~~the horse~~ the good old fellow for all [illegible] ~~there is in him unless it can not possibly be avoided.~~

Nor is cross country riding ~~a difficult feat~~ in the least a difficult thing to learn; always provided ~~a man~~ the would-be learner is gifted with, or has acquired, a fairly stout heart; for a constitutionally timid person is ~~rather~~ especially out of place in the hunting field, ~~than he is~~. A really finished cross country rider, a man who combines hand and seat, heart and head, is of course rare; and though there are a number such among the men who follow the Meadowbrook hounds, yet their standard is too high for most of us to hope to reach it. But it is comparatively easy to acquire ~~get~~ a light hand and a capacity to sit fairly well ~~the fast~~ down in the saddle; and when a man has once got these he will find no especial difficulty in following the hounds on a

hound hunting, and after he has once taken to the sport he will hardly give it up again of his own free will; for there is no other that is so manly and healthgiving and at the same time yielding so much fun and excitement. Unless he is learning horsemanship [illegible], by the way, the tyro had best [illegible] [illegible] more tolerance for styles of riding other than that alone he adopts. At some of the meets, although unfortunately not by any means at all of them, he will see a few outriders, who are not regular members of the hunt; and because one of these perhaps, rides an army saddle, wears a slouch hat, and has a long tailed horse, the man whose rig is of the smartest very probably looks down on, while the slouch-hatted horseman, in return, and with quite as illogical [illegible] affects to despise, as a mark of effeminacy, the faultless get-up of the regular hunt member. The [illegible] long is quite as absurd on one side as on the other (is natural American doctrine of "live and let live"). It is perfectly right and proper that the man who wishes to and can afford it should have both himself and his horse turned out in the very latest style; only he should then make up his mind to live well in the front; for it is ridiculous to see a man in an elaborate get-up who nevertheless potters about in the rear or rides along roads. On the other hand there are plenty of men who can not or will not come [illegible] which

[illegible] hunters [illegible] that their affairs do not concern any body else but themselves. It is the true policy to welcome warmly any man who cares for the sport, provided he is plucky, good tempered and rides his own line; and whether he wear a stiff silk hat or a broad brimmed felt one has nothing whatever to do with the question. Again, the cross country rider is apt to look with contempt upon what is commonly called school-riding; a contempt which can [illegible] however [illegible] yet the latter in reality presents elegance, as any one must acknowledge who has seen the really wonderful feats of horsemanship performed by a first class school rider. In return the school rider, with equal injustice, then speaks of riding to hounds as if it called merely for a kind of half barbarous capacity to cling to a horse going in any kind of way over obstacles. Yet aside from all question of comparative skill, the other half [illegible] in reality half the pleasure of a cross country riding comes from its surroundings, and from the excitement attendant upon it. A sharp gallop in the crisp fall weather, under the stress of an eager though friendly rivalry with a dozen other well mounted men, dashing along among the half leafless trees or over the brown fields, taking stiff timber without flinching; when the sky overhead is of the brilliant, metallic blue rarely seen save in America, and the foliage that is still left on the trees shows crimson and yellow, dull red and

russet brown; such a gallop, I say, will make a man's heart leap and his nerves thrill and tingle with an absolutely fierce pleasure that could not be given by the performance of the most difficult feat known to the admirers of the haute école.

Last spring I went east in the middle of the hunting season, [illegible] ~~pursuing [illegible]~~ and it was curious to compare the totally different styles of riding of the cowboys and the cross country men. A stock saddle weighs ~~[illegible]~~ thirty or forty pounds instead of ten or fifteen, and needs an utterly different ~~seat~~ seat from that adopted in the east. A ~~cowboy~~ cowboy rides with very long stirrups, sitting forward well down between his high pommel and cantle, and depends greatly upon mere balance. In cutting out a steer from a ~~bunch of others~~ herd, in sitting a bucking broncho, in stopping a night stampede of many hundred maddened animals, or in the performance of a hundred other feats of reckless and daring horsemanship the cowboy is absolutely unequalled, and ~~[illegible]~~ having his own horsegear he sits his animal with the ease of a centaur. Yet he is curiously helpless the first time he gets astride one of the small eastern saddles. Last summer, while buying cattle in Iowa, one of my ranche foremen had

to get on an ordinary saddle to ride out a bunch of steers. He is perhaps the best rider on the ranche, and will without hesitation mount and master beasts that I doubt if the boldest rider in one of our eastern hunts would care to tackle; yet his uneasiness on the new saddle was fairly comical. At first he did not dare to trot, and the least plunge of the horse bid fair to unseat him; nor did he begin fairly to get accustomed to the situation until the very end of the young colt. In fact the two kinds of riding are so very different that a man only accustomed to one feels almost as ill at ease when he first tries the other as if he had never sat on a horse's back before. It is rather funny to see a man who only knows one kind, and is conceited enough to think that that is the only one worth knowing, when first brought into contact with the other. Two or three times I have known men try to put [illegible] on stocksaddles, which are about as ill suited for the purpose as they well can be; while it is even more laughable to see some young fellow from the east or from England, who thinks he knows entirely too much about horses to be taught by barbarians, attempt in his turn to do cow work with his own riding or hunting rig. Each kind of [illegible] is best in its own place; and the man only accustomed to one will at first find himself at a disadvantage when he tries the

others. It must be said however that in all probability cowboys would learn to ride well across country much sooner than the average cross country rider would ~~learn~~ master the ~~[illegible]~~ [illegible] ~~[illegible]~~ and the ~~[illegible]~~ [illegible] style of ~~[illegible]~~ horsemanship necessary to those whose ~~[illegible]~~ life business it is to guard the ~~great [illegible] of the~~ wandering herds of the great western plains. ~~And~~ Perhaps a cavalry officer trained at West Point is, perhaps, taking it all in all, not unlikely to surpass as a horseman ~~apt to be [illegible] as a little superior, to either~~ both cowboy and foxhunter.

Riding to hounds has the immense advantage over most other athletic sports that it ~~calls for the exercise of moral even~~ more than other sports calls for the possession of moral even more than of physical good qualities. Of course in hunting a man has to ~~possess~~ have a good deal of skill and a certain amount of ~~[illegible]~~, wiry toughness and endurance; ~~not that it does not need any thing like the totally develop~~ and his physique if not already good, will rapidly become much better; but there is no need for anything like the bodily development necessary to one who wishes to become a crack oarsman, for instance; while on the other hand there is an amount of pluck and nerve needed which ~~rowing does not~~ neither rowing nor any other form of athletics, except perhaps foot ball, calls for. Moreover hunting can be enjoyed in different ways and degrees by almost everybody ~~while~~ who can has a horse, while but a very limited number can take part in a boat race or in a baseball contest ~~game~~. It is really an essentially democratic

amusement, where every one stands on the same ~~[illegible]~~ plane.
If this is once realized, and if men get to appreciate that any
one who can get on a horse can take such part as his
powers and tastes incline him to in ~~a~~ one of a most manly and
healthy of out door sports, hunting, ~~a better a [illegible] or so called~~ a manly pace! become
popular. Moreover ~~it [illegible] would tend to the superabundant energies~~ the bolder, wilder spirits, certain to be found in any
~~of the~~ community, who in time of war develope into men like Ulric
Dahlgreen or Cushing, but who in time of peace are apt
to go the ~~bad~~ road merely from the ~~[illegible]~~ revolt against the decorous lameness of their
life, find in hunting an outlet for their superabundant
energies. If in 1860 riding to hounds had been at the
north, as it was at the south, a national pastime, it
would not have taken us until ~~nearly the end of the war~~ well on towards the middle of the war to
before we were able to develope a cavalry capable of ~~resisting~~ withstanding
the shock of the southern horsemen.

As is always the case when an attempt is made to
introduce anything new or out of the common, the effort to make
riding to hounds a recognized amusement in the northern states
has given rise to a great deal of criticism, mostly of a singularly
senseless sort, ~~Most of the criticism~~ characterized by the sheerest and densest ignorance of the
whole subject. Much of this criticism comes from men themselves
too weak or too timid to do anything needing daring or involving
the slightest personal risk, and who are actuated simply by ~~a [illegible]~~ jealousy

of those who possess the attributes that they themselves lack,

A favorite cry is that hunting is both artificial and un-American, Of course it is artificial. So is every other form of sport in civilized countries, from a paper chase ~~Baseball~~ to a game of base ball. Anything more artificial than shooting quail on the wing over a trained setter could hardly be imagined. Hunting large game in the west with ~~Stag hunting is often [illegible]~~ the rifle undoubtedly calls for the possession of a greater number of manly and hardy qualities on the part of those who take part in it than is the case with riding to drag hounds; but, unless the quarry is the grizzly bear, it does not need nearly as much personal daring. ~~Almost any form of sport with a shotgun~~ ~~to go without~~ To object to hunting because they hunt in England is about as sensible as to object to lacrosse because its distant origin ~~[illegible]~~ ~~with the Indians. We do not care whether~~ We do not care to concern ourselves with the [illegible] as to whether a particular ~~sport was~~ originated with Indians, or Englishmen, or Hottentots, so long as it is attractive and health-giving. It goes without saying that the man who takes to hunting not because it is a manly sport but because it is so considered abroad, is a foolish snob; but after all he stands just about on the same intellectual level with the man who refuses to take it up because it happens to be ~~[illegible]~~ used the other side of the water.

To ~~This~~ say the sport is unamerican seems particularly ~~[illegible]~~ absurd to such of us as happen to be in part of southern blood, and whose forefathers, in Virginia, Georgia, or the Carolinas have for six generations followed the fox with horse and hound.

Theodore Roosevelt